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7:00 a.m. Study Series

October 15 - November 19, 1986

Gabriel Fackre - The Christian Story

INTRODUCTION

1. The Gospel as the "Biography of God"

The confusions

cult religions, new Right - and the

Possibilities of this time make the study necessary.

The book is for students, not browsers.

It is a systematic approach to doctrine.

2. Narrative Theology

Recovery of imagination is happening.

Recovery of story telling - see Keillar

Three distinct, overlapping forms of Narrative Theology:

a. Canonical story - Bible

b. Life Story - experience

c. Community Story - Christian Tradition

3. Coring (p. 10)

Is there a core - or a pleuralism of ideas, stories?

Gabriel Fackre et al say yes - "there is an out-thereness of biblical truth."

2nd Century Church had to focus...produced "Rule of Faith" - Apostles Creed.

3rd & 4th Centuries had to be clear about basic faith re. distortions. Produced Nicene Creed.

"All statements bear marks of their age" - the issues and the language of the day.

But there is a core of tradition - in Bible and early Church.

Creation, Fall, Covenant, Christ, Church, Salvation, Consumation.

4. Translation

Each age must restate story in light of its own concerns - translate - e.g. Freedom - liberation story in 20th Century.

p.15 "Whether one's translation of the Gospel is really heard or understood...depends on how deeply the translator is immersed in the world and has learned its idiom."

5. Authority

What are authoritative materials for the work of theology?

a. Bible

b. Life and traditions of Church

c. Setting in world of experience

Each is distorted by some - when it becomes only source of authority.

a. Bible tells basic events - the substance of the story.

Christ event is central for all the rest of the Bible.

All Bible seen through Christ. See p. 20

b. Church - past and present.

"Fathers and mothers have bequeathed us the faith - brothes and sisters help us believe and live today.

c. World - "General human experience in all its variety, richness, ambiguity." (p. 23)

6. Perspective

"The views we hold are shaped by where we stand." (or sit in pews) p.26

Here the distortions in authority occur:

Bible alone - fundamentalism

Church alone - ecclesiasticism

Experience/World - both secularism and evangelicalism

"The elements of authority do their work in getting the Story straight when they are bound together, and when each is honored for the gift it brings to the rest--a source, resource, and setting." p.28

"The art of perspective therefore is to learn to relate but not to capitulate to the culture out of which that perspective grows." p.29

Student must locate own perspective - "modest but meaningful cultural awarenesses to which our theology must be alert." p.30

A. Metaphor #1 - The two dominant motifs of our age's perspective are:

the visual media	and the Visionary Phenomena
TV - telecommunication	Rising expectations - Castro, Ortega, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Ghandi, Mandella

To be authentic any retelling of the Christian story in our time must take into account the above vision, particularly, points to the future.

B. Metaphor #2 - Light - what we need to see the right vision.

Logos - As what light to see by.

C. Metaphor #3 - Liberation and Reconciliation

Twin theme which is the "translation key" for modern retelling of Christian story. p.34

Why? Gabriel Fackre uses hiw own method of measuring authority..."a perspective is viable when by the power of the Holy Spirit it rises out of contemporary experience, is tested by the traditions and life of the Church, and is legitimated by Scripture." p. 34

Cite - worldwide experience of liberation (p. 34, bottom) and reconciliation (peace) (p. 35)

The word GF will use for these two motifs is Shalom.

D. Shalom - Freedom from sin/death and reconcilation with God, human family and nature.

"Shalom envisages the end of every bondage and the overcoming of each alienation." p.36

This is the captivating, inspiring vision we have allowed to erode and be replaced by a shabby, literalistic fundamentalism.

The reality of 60's and 70's crushed the vision for many and they reacted/retreated - cults, narcissism, despair - as the visionaries were assassinated.

So the story must incorporate the reality of the vision's shadow, negative side - "bondage and alienation."

7. Revelation

"The Christian Story is not just a statement of who we are, but an affirmation about the way things really are. It make truth claims." p. 40

The Revelatory Process

Image of God in us is blurred but not gone. The original light is not altogether out.

The remainder of the natural light of creation shines through human achievements of the good, the true, the beautiful. p.43

Art - beauty - justice - truth ---"breakthrough of light"

The natural light breaking through.

8. Covenant Vision

God showing humanity, through Israel, the way to Shalom - (Pillar of Fire, Exodus)

"The Holy Spirit gives the gift of illumination to the community of faith and to individuals - in moments of insight - Eureka!

The story/vision must be -

Coherent - any reading of story which does not honor the work of the Holy Spirit in science - will be off target. The Spirit of Shalom is living presence in the world in feeding the hungry, doing justice, making peace.

Intelligibility

Continuous - with Christian past and Church

Derivative - from Bible

PROLOGUE - GOD

John 1:1 - is prologue to whole story. Christian should read it first - "the architect's plan for the universe."

Forevision

Logos - contemporary meaning is vision.

God has a plan, a "dream"

Election - "the eternal decision, to fulfill the secret purpose whatever the cast." p. 57

Empowered Hopes

Christian talk about God is not abstract - i.e."God is ominopotent"...but active.

"Whatever we say about God, the central character of the Christian story, must be drawn first and foremost from the central event in that epic, Jesus Christ." p. 58

Holy Spirit

- is the source of God sufficient to living the vision to reality.

The Trinity

Envisioner, Vision, Power

Augustine used psychological metaphoe - memory, understanding, will.

God is one - not these three faces (persona) of God

To know Jesus Christ is to know what the Eternal Vision is. p. 61

Masculine Imagery of Trinity

Jesus Christ relates to human beings and envisions a world that transcends the patterns of dominance and submission that characterize this fallen world..."there is no male nor female" (Gal. 3:28)

"The everlasting Purpose transcends our divisions and imperialisms." p. 62

There is a tradition of feminism imagery:

Advent Hymn - Wisdom on High - "her" p. 63

Middle Ages - Prayers to Christ - he and she

An inclusive Vision cannot arise from a less-than-inclusive Envisioner.

God is divine parenthood fulfilled.

It is more difficult to recast liturgical language, but rewarding because it expands our consciousnous of God.

But - biggest problem is prayer which is intimate communication. We don't use "parent" as model of address.

Perhaps time will come when we overcome limitation of our language - in the meantime, personal model of address is important.

God became human is a male - in a patriarchal society (who would have listened to female?) - but in a way that challenged the image and tradition and stereotype.

Letty Russell suggests she for Holy Spirit.

(ruach is feminine; pneuma, neuter)

Language ultimately is human, thus finite, limited: it is important to keep liturgy and prayer personal communication and not recede into new abstraction.

Free To Be Together - God's Dream

"Manifest in Jesus Christ is a holy Love active in liberating the world from the tyranny of sin, evil, and death, and reconciling humanity, nature, and God." pp. 66/67

liberation from enemies for reconciliation -

i.e. Shalom - the freedom and unity of all things.

Chapter I CREATION

Creation is the opening chapter of a plot conceived in eternity.

Why Creation? Oldest theological question.

a. Oldest answer - God doesn't need creation.

b. God creates because of "overflowing love."

K.B. "God does not will to be God without the world."

God creates covenant partner, free to respond to holy law - to be in Shalom.

Thus Freedom in Creation is major theological motif.

"The intention of God requires in the covenant partner a real freedom to respond to the invitation....Genuine life together can rise only out of a love born in freedom." p. 69

The whole cosmos is part of the story - all of nautre - stones and stars. The vision of Shalom includes harmony and reconcilation in nature and between humanity and nature (life together) - original sin perhaps no where as clear as in our estrangement, alienation from nature and our misuse of it.

Nature is perfect and good in its natural state.

HUMAN NATURE

Freedom comes full flower to say Yes or No to God.

Freedom and ability to enter into deepest intimacy with God.

Imago Dei

i.e. the clarity of sight (to see the Vision) and the eminent capacity to respond to it...includes our reason and our spirit (the mysterious ability to reflect on on our ourselves - to transcend self - RN)

Our "original righteousness" - our capacity for the return of God's overture of love. p.72

CREATION OUT OF NOTHING

Means - Nature is not holy - not God - (as if it were created out of the stuff of God).

Nor was it made from pre-existing matter (which is basis of ancient dualism).

Being as such is Good - Augustine.

"God invented matter, therefore he must like it." W. Temple

SCIENCE AND STORY

No conflict - Bible not astrophysics book.

(Science - is evidence of Spirit.) JMB

New support from Science for premise of Christian story.

a. There was a beginning.

b. History is a process, progression.

CREATION AND TRINITY

First person is Creator, but other two are involved.

"Creation is a making, done by the Envisioner according to the Vision and enabled by the Power of God." p. 75

CONTINUING CREATION

United Church Creed used present tense - "God calls worlds into being."

"The divine creativity is not limited to the beginnings of the world. The continued existence of the world depends on the freedom of God to re-create, to perpetuate this great experiment in Shalom." p. 76

Edit. - G.F. lacks literary grace and imagination. His prose is tortured, difficult, not easily read.

Chapter II FALL

Adam - Humankind. "His saga is ours" p. 77

The point is not that we should not pursue knowledge, but that we must be responsible about our decisions.

Also, it is not that sexuality, sensuality is scurce of evil "a foreign body in the blood stream of Christianity which has done untold damage."

Sin - p. 76 - Great paragraph.

"turning inward of self away from God, neighbor and nature.

An ego trip inward.

Our vision replaces God vision - then ultimately sin is idolatry - pride.

Sin prompts escape from freedom - into concupiscence (power) or acedia (apathy)

Christianity is suspect of power.

Theology relies on other disciplines for support (often _____)

Philosophy - existentialism points to the "universal anxiety that comes about by living at juncture of the finite and infinite." p. 79 Sin is result of trying to cope with ambiguity. (RN)

It even infects our religion - "phariseeism."

The effects -

Rift between humanity and God
Nature
Neighbor - War

So we turn pruning hooks into spears - in complete reversal of God's vision.

We deliberately set ourself against neighbors and nature, which is to say God.

The original image continues to entice us - we remember "Faint recollection of Eden."

Paul struggles with it.

"The good which I want to do, I fail to do...." Ro. 7:19

"Who will save me from the body of death." Ro. 7:23

Paul's anguished cry is profound Christian analysis of human condition - realistic, sober and suspicious of all human claims of utopie and perfectibility.

EVIL

Historically attributed to demons or Satan. Even though the images are not ours, the reality of evil in God's world is still with us

GF suggests new metaphorses: Psychological, sociological, political, geological, medical -

The mystery of principalities and powers.

The fundamental temptation is to seize power.

"The acquisition of power for self-serving ends precipitates the Fall." p. 84

Does this shed light on existence of evil?

GF - it does and _____

Is there a perversity within nature?

DEATH

History and man - alienation/separation from God, which is result of Sin.

PROVIDENCE

God keeps taking care of his Vision.

We are free to reject, but God keeps at it....

healing, rebirth, growth - keep happening in nature and history.

"In the history of nature and humanity, there is a law of Shalom at work." p. 87

"There is also a tender and individual care operating which numbers the hairs on our heads and marks the sparrow's fall."

Chapter III COVENANT

Primal Covenant - in Creation. "God does not will to be God without a life together with the world in freedom and peace." p. 89

Now - the Particular Covenant

COVENANT - "the solemn promise to fulfill a declared purpose" - i.e. God's word to fulfill the Vision.

"Covenant in biblical perspective is the stubborn, unswerving commitment to the Shalom God wills for the world...but more...a pledge to execute this purpose through a particular people.

EXODUS AND LAW

"God does a deed among his people that enacts the Dream of liberation and reconciliation." pp. 90/91.

Exodus is pivot - makes them a visionary people - and begins, in their history, a rhythm of promise fulfillment.

Part of the Covenant are the laws of the New Land - "the precepts of Shalom - a realistic law, for fallen world - kept alive by priests who celebrate it and make atonement, sages who meditate on it and expand it.

Law - produces Temple and Cult

THE PROPHETS

(One of best treatments of what the Prophets are about.)

They see the Vision of God - Shalom.

- Animal world, encompasses humanity, healing between nations and in soul of individual. pp. 92/93

The people who bear the Vision and remind rest of world of what God intends, are rejected and hated.

Anti-Semitism p. 94

WHERE DOES THE COVENANT LEAD?

Why do good people suffer - bearers of Covenant?

OT answers: God will make it right.

A vuture event will put things back...

either in history/or outside history.

A Messiah will come to do either or both, and the Messiah himself will suffer.

Chapter IV JESUS CHRIST: PERSON AND WORK (Incarnation and Atonement)

THE PERSON OF CHRIST: INCARNATION

Who is he? Many modern and ancient answers, most of which say: 1. One of us: Spiritual

2. Unlike us: Human

Early church identified "heresy" - warnings - at Nicea (325) - Chalcedon (451)

The Biblical Witness

1. Christology from earliest texts - "new quest for historical Jesus."
2. From above - doctrines, depending on assembled proof texts.

GF will do little of both.

The Deity of Christ

Context is John 1 - eternal framework for incarnation.

In Jesus Christ, the eternal Vision becomes flesh.

The Journey of the Logos

A difficult but interesting exercise.

Peace acts in a fashion commensurate with that end.

The Sinlessness of Jesus
(defending Docetism at the last barricade?)

Sin - is blindness to the light:

Sinlessness of Jesus is "unclouded vision"

which made Jesus "incapable of sin" - not

petty moral transgression -

"Here the Dream is displayed in human history, one that discloses who God is and exposes who we are." p. 113

"The declaration of sinlessness - is the assertion that in and through the attitude and action of Jesus of Nazareth we have un unobstructed view of ultimate reality." p. 114

The Unity of Christ

Chalcedon 451 - One Person, in two natures - without confusion, change, division, separation - etc."

Nestorians, et al - "A schizophrenic Christ with a double personality."

Unity must be maintained - and grounded in God.

"The unity of Jesus with God is to be found in their common Vision. What God projects on the screen of the future, the man of Galilee sees." p. 118

THE WORK OF CHRIST: ATONEMENT

Ecumenical consensus on Incarnation, but none on atonement.

Sources are: 1. Biblical Data

2. Tradition - i.e. the issues, problems faced by Church, the response to which was a theory of atonement.

Ala Pelikan on Christology - "Questions and issues in a given milieu make their presence put on a doctrine of Atonement." p. 122

Role Models (4 Classis Atonement Theories)

1. Jesus as Example and Teacher

Problem - Lack of knowledge/truth.

Answer - Christ, teacher and example of knowledge/truth.

"In Jesus' words and deeds we learn that God is Love and that we are called to be loving....Atonement means changing hearts and minds of human beings so they will love God and neighbor."

a. Strength - takes seriously Jesus Galilee teaching.

b. Weakness - Doesn't take sin seriously. We need good news, not good advice.

2. Jesus as Substitute and Savior

We require drastic action because we are in deep trouble.

Problem/issue - is sin/guilt - "Because we are trapped in our sin, we cannot do what the Example and Teacher says we must do. We need a Source.

Old Tradition

a. Anselm's "satisfaction theory" (p. 126)

feudal system - extraordinary sacrifice

wins favor.

b. Reformation -"penal substitutionary"

c. Sacrificial theory - Offering pleasing to God.

In all, an obstruction to reconciliation is removed.

Most people believe one or the other of these - and it does take the human condition seriously.

Weakness - reductionism - "Its tunnel vision of the Work of Christ does not allow Galilee or Easter or finally Bethlehem to enlarge the significance of Atonement..." "I love Jesus but I hate God." - thus it denies Incarnation - i.e. to see the work of Jesus as the work of God, not a work done by God to Jesus" - or by Jesus for God.

also preoccupation with personal cleansing of sin/guilt - overshadows "Vision" of Shalom to which the Galilean Christ beckons us.

Also, Easter becomes an appendage.

3. Jesus as Conqueror and Lord

Historical crisis/oppression often stimulate the _____

1930's Gustaf Aulen, Christus Victor

Lib. Theol. today -

Issue/concern - Evil and death in history.

Christ, in this theory, meets and defeats the foes of God, evil and death - thus, Easter is the focus - the victory - "That God raised JC from the dead signifies the victory over the powers of evil, and finally also victory over death in the deepest meaning, the death of hope for the world." p. 131 This is strong stuff for oppressed people.

Weakness - tends for ourselves personal sin -

- personal culpability is mot given its due -

- expectations for history are too high - utopianism becomes narrow fanaticism -

- Little focus on tenderness of Galilean Jesus.

4. Jesus as Presence (totally inadequate treatment!)

Issue is transience - personal mortality.

Space and time are transformed by Christ's having become part of them - as dye colors water.

Good summary chart on p. 135

THE THREE-FOLD WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

(GF's view of Atonement)

Prophet/Priest/King

1. Prophet and Seer

Jesus stands in OT tradition of ones who "see the Vision of God and make it plain...He caught sight of and pointed toward the coming Kingdom in which the will of God would be done on earth as well as it is in Heaven. He is the revealer of the future of God." p. 137 - See more on the Vision - What Jesus saw/taught.

The ground and goal of the Vision is Agape , the boundless, unconditional Love which produces Shalom, p. 138

"The cost-benefit analysis of Agape show a preposterous balance sheet: its bottom line is written in the red of crucifixion. Agape is spendthrift." p. 139

Jesus enacted - as well as taught. "He did what he said."

As prophet, he also disclosed the depth of our aversion to the Vision (sin)

The final ground of Shalom is divine Agape.

Prophet points to intimate relationship with God - Abba.

2. Priest and Sufferer

Prophet tells new vision - priest deals with gap between vision and reality of where people are.

We are judged by Christ's life.

The Cross - an attack on the Vision and on God himself - it is God suffering for us and with us a vulnerable God.

(- do more here)

3. King and Liberator

Christ overcomes the last enemy.

The battle is joined at Bethlehem, fought in Galilee, and won on Calvary (Easter.)

"On resurrection morning, Christ beats down Satan and all his hosts and destroys death. The very worst that the world hurls at the Vision cannot finally extinguish the Light of God (Col. 1:13). The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that evil in all its forms--the ills of the flesh, the disasters of nature, the holocausts of history--do not have the last word. The enemy does not control the fguture. The intention of God to bring the kingdom cannot be turned aside; Shalom will be! And as doom is spelled for the powers of evil, and sin is overcome by the divine mercy, so too death meets its match. When Christ rose from the grave, he signaled the death of death and the coming of Life. Easter means that the Vision of God is victorious over its foes

and the reconciliation of all things is the destiny of the Great Experiment of creation. 'Courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world' (John ;6:33). pp. 147/148

What really happened on Easter?

1. Physical body raised.

2. Spiritual body raised.

3. Physical body raised and transformed.

4. Nothing

5. Resurgence of faith.

GF votes #3

Easter is continuing event in history.

"And from that elusive event in our own history when a soft answer turns away wrath, a power structure is humbled, and systemic change occurs by the life and witness of a Martin Luther King, healing happens, or the sting of death is removed through the agency of suffering love. But these are just clues, for until the final reckoning with evil and death in that eschatological toal toward which history now drives, suffering love continues as crucified love, and the Kingdom comes as portent and firstfruit and not fulfillment." p. 149

Theodicy

"...in defense of God's goodness and omnipotence despite the presence of evil." p. 150

Problem is based on our view of power - no potentate/monarch.

Shared Work of Prophet, Priest, and King

"Christ brought us at-one-ment, liberation from sin, evil and death, and reconciliation with God, neighbor, and nature." p. 153

The deed of Christ begins with prophetic work. He saw and shared Vision of God - but with Him the Vision becomes enfleshed - and then lived out - finally culminating in his suffering for the Vision, and victory over its foes.

CHAPTER V - CHURCH: NATURE AND MISSION

Ascension/Pentecost - Scripture account of ascension is bridge from Christ to Mission of Church.

Pentecost - the power of divine light descends, allowing them to see the Vision and speak the language of a new Kingdom.

- consistent with the incarnation, it happens to ordinary folks. What is created at Pentecost is Visionary Community - the dawn people, children of light.

The Gifts of the Spirit and Marks of the Church

Gifts

1. Kerygma - The report of Good News, proclamation of Gospel - the story is told.
2. Leitourgia - Church celebrates story. "The prayers and songs of the Church keep the people of God in communion with the Vision of God."
3. Diakonia - The Spirit empowers us to see the needs of brothers and sisters - Care in body and spirit.
4. Koinonia - Being together, sharing, life together.

Marks - Classics from Apostles' Creed.

1. Victory - oneness
2. Holiness
3. Catholicity
4. Apostolicity

Protestant formula has always been - "Right preaching of the word and proper administration of the sacraments."

MISSION

The Spirit does not create community to tell and celebrate story to itself - but for Mission. "Light and fire are for warmth and power. Inreach is fulfilled in outreadh." p. 166

The Vision leads the community outside - to share.

1. Deed - Mission is diakonia - empowered to see the invisible, Church thinks and does - the unconventional, unthinkable, miracle -
2. Word - Mission is telling, showing, as well as doing. (No parochial evangelism!) - "getting the story out, flinging the Christian Faith in the air." p. 168

3. Call - An invitation to respond.

Growth is an "expectation of mission."

The debate on strategy is necessary, but the hope/expectation cannot be disputed.

4. Confirmation - "The structures of power that took offense at the Good News, in this case, are made up of a military-political-ecclesiastical complex which felt its hegemony threated by the visual and verbal signs of the New Age." p. 169

See Acts -

"Confrontation with authorities and principalities is a mark of mission." p. 169

Peter/John - ML, Worms - MLK, Birmingham - Bonhoeffer - Pilate, Christ in Pilate

Confrontation - for what purpose?

To call to accountability all structures of power and authority - to Christ's reigh.

Confrontation is risky business.

Sect and Church

Somewhere the call to radical obedience must be honored - to keep church from settling in too comfortably -

exclusiveness verses inclusiveness

We need to value both models of Church.

GF says there is room for "Church within church."

p. 173

Church, World, God

God's grace in the world, as well as in the Church.

THE MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

Cite confusion re "ministry" Clergy/laity.

Renewal moments have reduced sense of identity for clergy.

General Ministry and Special Ministries

"Baptism is ordination to General Ministry" p.176

Some must be custodians of the Memory and Celebration - "ears and mouth and eyes" of the Body - without which body would be deaf, dumb, blind -

But body needs to walk, work, run, dance

Why not commission laity for Mission? - As in ordination of deacons - and commissioning for membership -

See summary on p. 180.

Note: - no reason not to ordain women.

Order and Orders

Congregational - (electronic church negates)

Presbyterial

Episcopal

Office of Bishop exists everywhere - dome don't name it. Future Church should.

THE SACRAMENTS

"They are the sign language of faith, the visible Word which portrays and declares the Good News of liberation and reconciliation. They are the happenings that give visibility to the Vision of God. But they are gestures of the Church which do what they say." p. 184

Baptism

Modern uneasiness about baptism.

Scripture and church tradition are full of it.

"Baptism is the enactment of the Church's vision of parental embrace in the Prodigal Ston story..." p. 186

(GF does not - and could/should - call in support from other disciplines - like child psychology)

What happens? p. 186

1. Baptism - is placed in environment of the Vision.

2. New relationship

3. Personal claim and call

Grace and Faith in Baptism

Grace is always present. Parents furnish the faith.

Grace saves when received by faith.

Household Baptism

Obviously part of early tradition. Contemporary expression is the too comfortable habit of having baby "done" as initiatory rite -

Integrety of membership becomes issue - so confirmation needs to be seen as sacred part of Baptism process.

SUPPER (GF simply wore out here!)

"Here is the presence of the Future...The Vision of God is given visibility in the last supper. Christ is Host, his disciples gather in communion with him and each other, the wheat and wine of the earth are consecrated." p. 190

Communion is-

- Memory and Hope
- Communion with Christ
- Communion of Saints
- Unity with the Earth
- Sacrifice
- Thanksgiving

CHAPTER VI SALVATION

Salvation from sin - for reconciliation/liberation/ Shalom. Salvation as process past, present, future. See H.R. Niebuhr's response to street Evangelist - "I was saved by what Christ did; I am being saved right now; I shall be saved when the Kingdom comes." p. 196

SALVATION NOW

Intense partisanship and intolerance within Christianity on the issue -

GF reminds that basis is salvation by Grace

SALVATION FROM SIN

Freedom from sin must be accepted - excellent exposition of grace - faith - pn p. 198

Grace is overflowing compassion/love of parent - open arms

Faith is decision to respond to it: to enter the open arms.

Further miracle is that even our faith response is gift of God. p. 198

The Pilgrimage of Grace and Faith and Martin Luther's story

Righteousness - not prize to be earned, but gift given by God.

Ambiguities about law

Perversity in human nature can use law for personal aggrandizement. "See how good I am. Who will deliver me?"

Grace and Faith in a Time of Vision and Reality

Same motive that called Luther to monastery calls folk to movements - secular and - All must confront reality of world and the danger of despair - "occupational hazards of dreamers." p. 202

Pardon and Power

Forgiveness prompts resolution; grace becomes sanctification; personal salvation becomes Agape love for world.

SALVATION FROM EVIL

In form of principalities/powers - political, economic, physical, personal, psychological -

"Where Christ is liberating now is where Christ was liberating in the days of his flesh...wherever and however bodies and minds are mended - Christ is present" p. 204

Where hungry are fed, etc., Christ is liberating.

"Salvation now is the presence of the Liberator, wherever the shackles of human bondage are being torn off and the oppressed set free. In our time we

discern his footprint in the struggles of the developing nation to be liberated from colonial domination, the ravages of hunger, and its own internal political tyrannies. And we see it everywhere there is to be found the struggle of ethnic, racial, and religious minority, the unfree majority, the unrepresented young, the ignored aging and elderly, the exploited women, the trampled class and caste. Christ is alive and at work wherever 'the least of these' raises a cry of anguish and hope." p. 205

Liberation theology has focused here. Christ is present also in defeat and despair and in times of gross sin and evil. We are learning more about the breadth and depth of evil. p. 206/7

<u>The Saving Presence of Christ</u>

As in Emmaus story, Luke 24:13-35

Christ of road and upper room.

He is present on road - incognito when little happens, but also on intense, personal, upper room experiences.

"Authentic faith keeps company the Christ of the road as well as the Christ of the room, ... To be with Christ is no serene stroll in the garden." p. 209

The Works of Love

Three categories - Heaven/earth/hell

Heaven - Cheek turning selflessness - It will be trampled in real life. We need reminders and examples - but "The perfect ethics of heaven cannot be exported in packaged fashion to earth." p. 210

Earth - "The work of love is to translate moral vision into the reality of claim and counterclaim ...setting bounds - honoring and protecting each person through moral law and legal code from "universal axioms" - justice come "middle axioms" - equal rights legislation. The danger always is legalism.

Hell - Direct confrontation with evil - love in ambiguous circumstance -

Revolution

Just War

Abortion

Marriage - divorce

All ethics are situational: Christian ethics are contextual - one part of context is situation: other part is Gospel and Grace.

Contextual always depends on the community for help in decision making. "What is Church saying about this?"

SALVATION FROM DEATH

Personal mortality - but power of death is separation from God.

Resurrection is more than promise of personal immortality - it is freedom from power of death

Christian hope knows that mortality is not the last fact about us, nor is death the last word about world and history.

The final conquest of death awaits the full day, but the sting has been taken away.

Despair paralyzes - Hope mobilizes -

Christian strides into future - confident of God.

SALVATION BY CHRIST ALONE?

New awareness of pluralism - and world religious - all searching: "the Scandal of particularity"

"Plural shock has resulted for many in christological heart failure." p. 219

Alternative positions:

1. Common care of truth in all religions.
2. Best in each joined in global faith (Bahai)

Conservative Christian position is imperialism - "Ours or nothing."

GF cites Barth and Rahner - on Christ as unique but effective for all: a new universalism.

CHAPTER VII CONSUMMATION
(Eschatology)

Three versions of eschatology

1. Concerns about personal mortality
2. Concerns about end of world/time/history
3. The critical, decisive moment of choice-encounter with Christ ala Bultmann an existentialist theologian.

Eschatology is important - NT is full of it.

MYSTERY AND MODESTY

In critical times the temptation has always been to try to say too much, and to forecast the end in very precise terms.

Premillennialist - rapture, tribulation, return of Christ and 1000 year reign, etc.

Postmilleannialist - Same thing, but Kingdom will come within history.

Modesty is best, not detailed travelogues.

What is certain is the importance of eschatology... in Christian thought.

Within Christian story eschatology is expressive in classic doctrines of:

Resurrection of the Dead

Return of Christ

Last Judgment

Everlasting Life

SCIENCE AND FAITH - No conflict. When conflict exists between accounts in our story and what science knows, we must choose science. Interestingly, science supports the basic framework of Christian eschatology - i.e. There is an end to time/history/world as we know it. If not by nuclear death or environmental polution, then the eventual entropy - running down of universe and sun.

THEMES BASHFUL AND BOLD

Different historic eras have emphasized different eschatological themes - e.g. judgment looms important where historic evil is .

We need to honor all the motifs of history.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

An awesome thought! God's memory is total - the Consummation reaches into every nook and cranny of history: none is forgotten! What has died is recovered.

Bodily resurrection - Creed inserted phrase to combat Gnostic and Docetic heresies - which denied bodies.

"Our bodies are part of God's final design." p. 228

We are not disembodied souls waiting for the release of death.

Resurrection of Dead has begun in Jesus Christ.

RETURN OF CHRIST AND FINAL JUDGMENT

Post resurrected Christ is not suffering servant but triumphant victor.

The coming of Christ at consummation is linked to the searching light of truth that holds all accountable. (GF becomes literalist here.)

(JB) He vascillates between the necessity of a judgment that will hold all accountable and the gracious forgiving Lord of Shalom in the process. He paints himself into a corner, the only solution for which is a form of purgatory. He's not the first to fall into the trap.

On the nature of the judgment -

"To see the ugly fact of our self-centeredness and its effects with blinding clarity is the excruciating pain of judgment. More so indeed for those who have made professions of loyalty to Shalom and have given lip service to liberation and reconciliation. What deepens the agony of this self-disclosure is the other fact that comes clear in this moment of judgment--

that the light of judgment is the light of Love. The harshest judge of a conscience that knows what it must do or what it should have done is to know the hurt it has caused. To know that we have broken faith with the One who has brought us to be, and to know the suffering we have caused God, culminating in the act of crucifying the Vision, that is horror indeed. p. 230

God's wrath is heaviest on agents of bondage, oppression - those who exploit the weak -

But the Christ of judgment is also suffering savior. P. 231 GF almost destroys unity of incarnation he has argued so vigorously for - "He is the advocate of the Father's Love before the Father's Wrath." (This is more than I can handle.)

For the judgment - what counts is faith demonstrating love by feeding, healing -

What of those who have not heard?

GF rejects universalism - emphasized grace's power to pursue the person after death -

(An almost silly proof text page-ful doesn't help his argument - but seems almost defensive. This is not his best chapter) -

Christ's saving work beyond death may have been the rationale for "descent into hell" in Creed -

Missionary theology became sensitive to other cultures and religions, and became less, not more imperialistic -

HELL AND DAMNATION

Must we consign better part of humanity to hell? What is it? Alternative scenarios

1. Light and Darkness - Fires of eternal hell - See NT references.
2. Light and No Darkness - No hell - light for all - universal salvation
3. Light Overcoming Darkness
   (Hegelian symthesis of 1 and 2)
   God's grace continuing into future.

GF likes #1 for insistance on accountability, but fails to keep basic Good News in focus.

NT views of punishment after accountability - is product of medieval concept of primitive justice.

GF returns to concept of God's stubborn love that will not give up on us...Hound of Heaven -

-

In conclusion GF becomes more mellow.

"There is hell and judgment. But the last word in the Christian Story is not that of a half-accomplished purpose, but of a promise kept and a Vision that becomes Reality....a modest (poor choice of word) hope, with its eschatological proviso, leaving all to God's will, yet shaped by the promise and power of a God who will be all in all." p. 240

EVERLASTING LIFE

1. Reconciliation of Humanity with God.
2. Reconciliation of Humanity.
3. Reconciliation of Nature.

"God's is a cosmic Vision. Its fulfillment is the restoration of all things. The ecological imperative of the Christian faith is grounded in this hope of God for the created order." p. 243

AFTER DEATH - INTERIM ESCHATOLOGY

Postmortem existence is current hot topic- two different scenarios:

1. Soul detaches from body, returns to God

Immortailty of Soul, not really Christian. See p. 245

"Though the attempts are constant to force this teaching of the immortality of the soul into the Christian system, so much so that many pulpits in an acculturated Christianity offer it as the yearly Easter diet, it must finally be declared indigestible. Christian faith has too profound and critical an understanding of human spirit to consider it the "divine" segment of the self worthy of immortality, and too high a view of the body to disdain and separate it from our final destiny. Both something

less and something more must be said about our penultimate and ultimate futures. p. 245

2. Death of body and soul (holistic death) until Resurrection.

Although #2 is more scriptural, #1 has merit in faithfully expressing the bond of love between God and person in Christ which is unbreakable. So, what happens? -

Sleep in God - "soul sleep"

"While awaiting the fullness of resurrection portended in the Easter Christ, death marks a stage on the way to that end, one in which the self is in some way alive and responsible in a fashion we cannot comprehend, 'having and not having' who and what we shall be." p. 247

Eternal life, after all, begins now and extends through death - "Nothing, St. Paul promised - "will separate us!"

HISTORICAL HOPE

There are signs of fulfillment in this world - Shalom - where sick are healed, captive set free -

Christian hope is sober hope - which takes human sin possible - but works for Kingdom because it knows that it is coming...there is light in darkness.

EPILOGUE - GOD

The narrative story of God - in Trinitarian terms focuses on divine behavior first, not divine attributes. Theology is a perception/description of divine, trinitarian mission.

- Creating, preserving - Envisionary - Father
- Liberating, reconciling - Vision - Son
- Redeeming - Power - Spirit

Now, as the tale unfolds, certain attributes of God become visible - emerge - "modes of the divine being" - "modest glances toward a Light whose inner reaches are finally 'hid from our eyes'." p. 252

FORMAL QUALITIES (Modes of Divine Being)

Subjectivity - God is subject - events rise out of a Self that purposes and chooses. God is initiator.

(If God is subjective - our experience of God is personal, intimate, not observable, analyzable from the outside, objective angle.

The danger is a too sticky piety, non-rationale, finally anthropomorphism - in which God is a projection of our own selves, feelings, experiences.

Reformation critiqued subjectivity.

But God is subjective; not exclusively, but surely -

Transcendence

At the same time God is more than us -

Two classic attributes of Transcendence are:

Infinity - God is not is space: Space is in God.

Eternity - God is not in time: Time is in God. p. 254

Immanence

God's involvement, intimately, with the world - the "warm currents of grace that flow in nature, history, relationships -

"Immanence is our description of these happenings that were, and are, and are to be in our time and space." p. 254

Immutability

God's unchangeableness, classically. Process theology challenges it. GF uses term, but really means steadfastness -

"God will not be deflected from the course - ...The Story is about a stubborn God, steadfast in purpose."

All-Sufficiency

"Deity has all that is necessary to fulfill the Vision."

- Not, however, based on our understanding of sufficiency. "Our language about God must be transformed by our experience of God - not vice versa. (This is what subjectivity really means.)

Omnipresence

We are never out of reach. See Ps. 139

Omniscience

God has all sufficient knowledge - a convoluted, but important section -

God becomes all. GF argues foreknowledge as well. Major enigma is: does this negate freedom of will, choice? GF tries to say no - but in my mind, doesnt succeed. Seems to say that God knows what our choices will be, but chooses not to know, or something like that.

"By this biblical criterion, foreknowledge means the grasp by God of the future in which the world shall be won to the divine purpose. God both foreknows and foreordains that Shalom shall be--divine election in its encompassing sense. The foreknowledge of God is grounded in the confidence God has in the power of God, the Holy Spirit, to fulfill the eternal purpose of God. Further, that foreknowledge must include the range of options the world has to respond to the divine invitation.

(continuing)

The omniscience of God in this context is the foreknowledge of the possibilities of choice, the scenarios of divine response and the ultimate outcome of the struggle between the numan No and the divine Yes. To believe in the all-sufficiency of God's knowledge to pursue the Story to its successful completion is to be prepared to affirm this much." p. 257

Bottom line for GF is that it is a real drama, not a marionette show. (At least, he knows what the issue is.)

Omnipotence

Almightiness

"By extrapolating from a fragmentary human experience of power--the capacity to influence things--we are inclined to interpret omnipotence to mean the power to effect and control all things." p. 258

We project on God our conception of power. In ancient world it was oriental potentate.

"But the God of the narrative we have explored is the God who is neither an autocratic regent or a take-charge Western sheriff. This Creator gives the world the space and time it needs to be what it will be. This Liberator and Reconciler does not act by force or fiat but by a vulnerable Love. Indeed this Redeemer and Consummator shall be 'all in all,' but only so along a journey of stubborn Love that stretches into eternity itself." p. 259

Omnipotence is understood exchatologically. The power of God in creation is also power of self-limitation. -

"God willed the world to have a fiatless freedom, for in the Dream of God there is no solidarity that is not freely chosen, no community that is not consented to. That is the nature of the divine Love which, by definition, cannot program or robotize its responses. The self-limitation of God is the risk taken that the world will say No to the invitation to life together with God. Herein is the vulnerability

of God. The history of God and the world is the Christian account of what God does about the abuse of that freedom. Its center point is the act of ultimate vulnerability when God plunges into the world at Incarnation and receives the ultimate rebuke on the cross." p. 259

The Power to bring about the vision is the Holy Spirit

Election, Predestination and Paradox!

Material Qualities

Shalom - An invitation to liberation, peace, and reconciliation.

Love - Unconditional Agape

Holiness -

Suffering -

MYSTERY AND MEANING

"When the whole Story is told and all efforts at Theological clarification are made, we confess to seeing through a glass darkly..." Whatever recounting is done will never exhaust the heights and depths of